

Washington, DC- Today, Rep. Tim Walz (MN-01), Rep. Peter King (NY-03), Rep. Joe Donnelly (IN-02), and Rep. Martin Heinrich (NM-01) introduced legislation to make it easier for veterans to start receiving the benefits they have earned.

“Many of our veterans currently wait too long for the VA to decide their disability rating and that is simply unacceptable,” said Rep. Tim Walz. “These are the men and women who did everything their country asked them to do. The least we can do is simplify and streamline the disability claims process to ensure that they start receiving benefits for straightforward claims right away.”

“Our brave servicemen and women who have become disabled while defending our country should not have to wait months to receive the benefits they deserve for their sacrifices made in combat,” said Rep. Peter King. “The disability claims backlog has reached an unacceptable level, which is why I am proud to cosponsor a solution that creates a fast-track system to begin the claims process without delay.”

“We owe our veterans the most efficient process possible to be compensated for injuries sustained during their service,” said Rep. Joe Donnelly. “This bill would make a common-sense improvement to the disability claims process: allow veterans with easily quantifiable injuries to quickly receive the benefits they’ve earned while the VA develops the rest of their claim. I’m proud to support this legislation because it would further improve upon our efforts to make life a little easier for American veterans.”

“Few sacrifices are as selfless as those our military service men and women make in the defense of our country,” said Rep. Martin Heinrich. “We owe them more than a debt of gratitude—we owe them action in both our words and deeds. With this legislation, we can fix a claims process that is plagued with a tremendous back-log. By streamlining the claims process, we will be able to compensate our service members in a manner and speed that directly reflects our steadfast commitment to them.”

This legislation is endorsed by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, The Retired Enlisted Association, the National Organization of Veterans’ Advocates, Inc., Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A., and the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

The Veterans’ Disability Claims Efficiency Act of 2010 would create a fast-track system within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to quickly grant initial disability ratings to veterans with straightforward claims. This process will place raters at the beginning of the claims process to assign temporary ratings to injuries that can be adjudicated based on the initial evidence submitted by the veteran. This new component to the claims processing system would give a veteran access to their benefits quickly while the VA develops the rest of their claim. Additionally, it would allow the VA to direct workflow in a more efficient way within the regional offices.

Congressman Walz worked closely with local veterans organizations to craft this legislation and solicited feedback from Minnesota veterans before the bill’s introduction today.

“After working as a County Veteran Service Officer for over 23 years, I believe this bill will solve a problem I have seen all too frequently with the claims veterans submit to the VA,” said Hank Sadler, disabled veteran and former County Veteran Service Officer from Nicolette County. “Congressman Walz’s work will streamline this process for veterans and make it easier to start getting the benefits they have earned.”